

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T SAIGON 15311

EXDIS

SPECAT EXCLUSIVE FOR MILITARY ADDRESSEES

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI VS

SUBJECT: POSSIBILITY OF INCREASED FIGHTING IN MR 1

FOLLOWING TEL SENT ACTION SAIGON DTD 10 DEC 1974 REPEATED

QUOTE

S E C R E T DANANG 0707

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, VS

SUBJ: POSSIBILITY OF INCREASED FIGHTING IN MR-1

1. DEC 5 DISCUSSED POSSIBILITY OF INCREASED FIGHTING IN MR-1
WITH MG HOANG VAN LAC, DEPUTY COMMANDER OF MR-1 AND ON DEC 9
WITH LTG NGO QUANG TRUONG, COMMANDER OF I CORPS.

2. BOTH MEN BELIEVE THAT I CORPS WILL SOON SEE INCREASED LEVELS
OF HOSTILITIES. BOTH ARE EXTREMELY RELUCTANT TO PREDICT THE
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NATURE OF DURATION OF THOSE HOSTILITIES SAYING THAT HANOI'S

DECISION IN THAT REGARD WILL BE DICTATED BY A NUMBER OF CONSIDERATIONS EXTERNAL TO SOUTH VIET NAM AND UNKNOWN TO THEM.

3. FINALLY, AFTER CONSIDERABLE PRODDING ON MY PART AND AFTER TRUONG ONCE AGAIN POINTED OUT THAT HE DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH INFORMATION TO MAKE AN ACCURATE PREDICATION AS TO HANOI'S INTENTIONS, HE POINTED TO THE INCREASED MILITARY CAPABILITY OF THE NVA/VC IN MR-1 AND ASKED "IF THEY DON'T INTEND TO USE IT WHY ARE THEY CONTINUING TO BUILD UP THEIR MILITARY STRENGTH?" THIS IS AS CLOSE TO A PREDICTION OF INTENTION AS EITHER MAN WOULD MAKE.

4. BOTH MEN ARE EXTREMELY INTERESTED IN OTHER PEOPLE'S VIEWS OF HANOI'S INTENTIONS AND WILL OCCASIONALLY SAY MILDLY PROVOCATIVE THINGS TO DRAW ONE OUT, BUT I DO NOT BELIEVE EITHER MAN HAS MADE UP HIS MIND AS TO WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR MR-1. UNTIL THEY DO THEY ARE, OF NECESSITY, FOCUSING ON NVA/VC CAPABILITIES AND ATTEMPTING TO PUT RVNAF IN MR-1 IN AS GOOD SHAPE AS POSSIBLE TO COPE WITH THOSE CAPABILITIES.

5. GIVEN THE REESTABLISHMENT OF THE NVA STRATEGIC RESERVE IN NORTH VIET NAM, THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE NVA LOGISTIC SYSTEM, THE CONTINUED INFLOW OF SUFFICIENT NVA/VC COMBAT REPLACEMENTS AND THE INCREASED AVAILABILITY TO THE NVA/VC OF UP-TO-DATE WAR MATERIEL IT IS A WORRISOME TASK. PARTICULARLY SINCE A NUMBER OF TRENDS ARE CURRENTLY WORKING AGAINST RVNAF'S MILITARY READINESS IN MR-1.

6. AMONG THE MOST WORRISOME PROBLEMS FACING TRUONG AND LAC ARE THE SEVERE RESTRICTIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN PLACED ON LOGISTIC SUPPORT TO RVNAF, PARTICULARLY IN THE FIELD OF AMMUNITION; THE REDUCED AVAILABILITY OF COMBAT REPLACEMENTS FOR BOTH MAIN FORCE AND TERRITORIAL GROUND UNITS; THE DETERIORATION IN TROOP MORALE BROUGHT ABOUT PRIMARILY BY THE SOLDIERS' PERCEPTION OF REDUCED EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE TO RVNAF AND CONTINUED EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE TO THE NVA/VC; THE ELIMINATION OF MILITARY PRESSURE ON NORTH VIET NAM AND ON NVA/VC LOGISTIC ROUTES IN LAOS AND CAMBODIA; AND THE WORSENING TACTICAL AND STRATEGIC POSITION OF RVNAF UNITS ON THE GROUND IN MR-1. TRUONG, PARTICULARLY, IS A MAN WHO IS QUITE CLEARLY CARRYING A HEAVY LOAD. HE IS
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NOT AT ALL DEFEATIST IN HIS ATTITUDE BUT, AS HE HIMSELF ADMITS, HE IS "VERY WORRIED ABOUT THE MILITARY SITUATION".

7. I ASKED TRUONG IF HE THOUGHT HE COULD HANDLE AN INCREASED LEVEL OF HOSTILITIES PRECIPITATED BY THE NVA/VC FORCES NOW IN MR-1 WITH EXISTING MR-1 RVNAF UNITS AND WITH CURRENT SUPPLY LEVELS. TRUONG SAID THAT EXISTING RVNAF UNITS COULD HANDLE SUCH A SITUATION BUT WOULD OBVIOUSLY OVERFIRE CURRENT JGS AMMUNITION

ALLOCATIONS AND WOULD CONTINUE TO SUFFER RATHER HEAVY MANPOWER LOSSES. ASSUMING THE NVA/VC KEPT THE PRESSURE ON FOR AN EXTENDED PERIOD AND ASSUMING NO CHANGES ON EITHER SIDE IN THE RESUPPLY OF MATERIEL AND MANPOWER, RVNAF CAPABILITY IN MR-1 WOULD CONTINUE TO DETERIORATE. GIVEN THE EXISTENCE OF THE NVA STRATEGIC RESERVE SUCH DETERIORATION IN RVNAF CAPABILITY IS CLEARLY VERY DANGEROUS.

8. I ASKED TRUONG WHAT WOULD OCCUR IF THE NVA INTRODUCED ONE OR MORE DIVISIONS OF THEIR STRATEGIC RESERVE INTO MR-1. MAKING THE SAME ASSUMPTIONS CONTAINED PARA 7 ABOVE, TRUONG STATED THAT THE SITUATION WOULD OBVIOUSLY BE "VERY DIFFICULT". THE MORE NEW FORCES THE MORE DIFFICULT.

9. IN ANSWER TO THE SAME QUESTION LAC REFERRED TO THE 1972 OFFENSIVE, SAID THAT RVNAF HAD NO PROBLEM OBTAINING SUFFICIENT COMBAT REPLACEMENTS, AND POINTED OUT THAT RVNAF FIRE POWER IN MR-1 DURING THE PERIOD OF THE OFFENSIVE INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING:

A. ARC LIGHT STRIKES. AN AVERAGE OF 15 TO 20 THREE PLANE B-52 MISSIONS PER DAY. DURING SOME OF RVNAF'S COUNTER-ATTACKS THE RATE WENT UP TO AS HIGH AS 40 MISSIONS PER DAY.

B. TACTICAL AIR STRIKES. AN AVERAGE OF 150 US TACTICAL AIR STRIKES PER DAY GOING UP TO A HIGH OF ABOUT 260 PER DAY.

C. NAVAL GUNFIRE MISSIONS. A MINIMUM OF 2000 ROUNDS OF US NAVAL GUNFIRE PER DAY. AN AVERAGE OF 3000 ROUNDS PER DAY AND A HIGH OF 5000 TO 6000 PER DAY.

D. ARTILLERY. JUST IN THE AREA NORTH OF HAI VAN PASS, RVNAF FIRED AN AVERAGE OF 600,000 ROUNDS OF ARTILLERY PER MONTH (OR 20,000 ROUNDS PER DAY). IT FIRED A HIGH OF NEARLY ONE MILLION ROUNDS PER MONTH IN AUGUST. DURING THE RVNAF COUNTER-ATTACK AT QUANG TRI, THE MARINES ALONE FIRED 15,000 TO 25,000 ROUNDS OF ARTILLERY PER DAY.

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10. AT THE PRESENT TIME RVNAF, OF COURSE, DOES NOT HAVE ACCESS TO US STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL AIRPOWER NOR DOES IT HAVE US NAVAL GUNFIRE SUPPORT. A RECENT BRIEFING AT THE 1ST AIR DIVISION GAVE NORMAL 1ST AIR DIVISION COMBAT CAPABILITY AS BEING 27 MISSIONS OF A-37 AND 4 MISSIONS OF F-5 PER DAY. EMERGENCY CAPABILITY IS 74 SORTIES OF A-37 AND 12 SORTIES OF F-5 PER DAY. (THE F-5 IS NOT BEING FLOWN IN A GROUND SUPPORT ROLE IN MR-1 AT THE PRESENT TIME.) ACCORDING TO I CORPS STAFF, MR-1 IS CURRENTLY FIRING ABOUT 170,000 ROUNDS OF 105,155, AND 175 ARTILLERY PER MONTH OR AN AVERAGE OF LESS THAN 6000 ROUNDS A DAY. THERE IS A TOTAL IN MR-1 OF 606,598 ROUNDS OF THESE THREE TYPES OF AMMUNITION AT THE PRESENT TIME.

FRANCIS
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